

Gender Equity Gaps in Wake County

Representation and Wages in STEM Fields

TECHNICAL REPORT

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About the Report

About Wake Invests in Women

The mission of Wake Invests in Women (WIIW) is to close the gender wage gaps for women in Wake County. Led by a Steering Committee of business, government, higher education and non-profit partners, supported by Wake Technical Community College as its backbone and sponsored by Wake County, WIIW aims to develop data-driven strategies for reaching pay parity, career advancement through the management pipeline, and increasing representation of women in higher-demand, higher-wage occupations. While most of these occupations can be categorized as STEM and STEM-related, lessons learned will be applied to other occupations/industries over time.

About the Report Collaborators



Wake Technical Community College

Wake Tech is North Carolina's largest community college, serving more than 70,000 adults annually, with six campuses, three training centers, multiple community sites, and a comprehensive array of online learning options. With a mission to provide "equitable access to education that transforms lives through economic mobility and personal fulfillment," Wake Tech functions as the backbone for the WIIW initiative, providing research, data and coordination support through the College Initiatives and Assessment Department of the Effectiveness and Innovation Division.





RTI, International

RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Its vision is to address the world's most critical problems with science-based solutions in pursuit of a better future. RTI has provided support for the multivariate statistics needed to glean insights into the gender wage gaps in Wake County.

North Carolina State University Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research

The Belk Center supports community colleges across North Carolina and the nation to help them improve student access and success through executive leadership programs, research support to North Carolina's community colleges, and a Doctor of Education Program in Community College Leadership. Thanks to Steering Committee member Andrea DeSantis, who has provided input into the analyses, literature reviews as well as input into the report.

Land Acknowledgment

Wake Invests in Women would like to acknowledge the traditional and ancestral land of the Tuscarora Nation, Skaru'ren (Skaroreh) tribe, on which we learn and work.

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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of Wake Invests in Women is to close gender wage gaps for women in Wake County. We aim to collaborate with corporate and community partners to develop datadriven strategies for reaching wage parity and increasing representation of women in higherdemand, higher-wage occupations. Our data has led to our current focus on increasing representation of Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women into STEM and closing existing wage gaps. While the initial focus is on STEM/STEM-related occupations, lessons learned will be applied to other occupations and industries over time.

WHY NOW?

Our research reveals significant gender wage and representation gaps within STEM fields in Wake County. Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women are especially underrepresented in STEM fields compared to their relative proportion in the labor force. Of the total labor force of Wake County, the three largest race/ethnic groups by gender are White males (32.3%), White females (29%) and Black or African American females (12%).

With the COVID-19 pandemic, Wake County has experienced a jump in unemployment from 4% to 11.5% in the two months between March and May 2020. Unemployment rates were higher for females than for males, with Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina females experiencing higher rates (18.6% and 19.6% respectively) than White females and males.

Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina Women are especially underrepresented in STEM fields compared to their relative proportion in the labor force. For example, while Black or African American women make up about 9% of employees in non-STEM fields in this study, they make up only 5% in STEM fields. Similarly, Hispanic or Latina women are significantly underrepresented with only 1.3% in STEM fields (Figure 1).

In addition to representation, on average, women earn less in STEM and STEM- related occupations, with the greatest disparities between Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women compared to White men. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting different demographic groups in different ways. While the overall unemployment rate in Wake County jumped from 4% to 11.5% between March 2020 and May 2020, unemployment rates were higher for females than for males, with Black or African American females experiencing higher unemployment rates (18.6%) than White females and White men (Table 2).

Call to Action

Gender representation and wage gaps in Wake County have been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment is higher among women compared to men, particularly in occupation families within STEM and STEM-related jobs, and among Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women as compared to White men. Even though Raleigh has been noted as one of the top 10 cities in the US best positioned to recover from the COVID-19 crisis (Moody's Analytics/ Forbes), the historically lower representation and wages of women in STEM and STEM-related fields in Wake County threatens to thwart this come-back.

Wake Invests in Women is uniquely positioned to help Wake County rebuild and thrive. Through its research-based practices and collective impact approach, the Wake Invests in Women initiative is designed to work with community partners in crafting, "pro-active, large-scale, and integrated measures...to make strong and sustained impacts" based on Wake County specific research (International Labor Organization, 2020).



The Wake Invests in Women initiative is designed to work with community partners in crafting, "pro-active, large-scale, and integrated measures...to make strong and sustained impacts."

— Based on Wake County specific research (International Labor Organization, 2020)

Introduction

Initiated and sustained by the Wake County Board of Commissioners, the Wake County Task Force on Women's Wages in Wake County, and Wake Technical Community College as its backbone organization, Wake Invests in Women (WIIW) became an official initiative of the Wake County Commission in 2018 with a mission to close gender wage and representation gaps for women in Wake County. Using a collective impact approach, the initiative is bringing together cross-sector partners (businesses, governments and non-profits) to develop a common agenda, a common measurement system, and a strategic action framework of mutually reinforcing activities for reaching pay parity, career advancement through the management pipeline, and increasing representation of women in higher-demand, higher-wage occupations.

At its core, Wake Invests in Women is a workforce development initiative with an equity lens; it therefore prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion for women. Its first priority is workforce and wage gaps in occupations where labor demand is greater than supply – occupations found largely among science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), STEM-related, and skilled technical fields.

For the purposes of this report, the gender wage gap is defined as the difference between the wages earned by women compared to those earned by men. The representation gap describes the difference between the number of women and men in a specific occupation or occupational group.



STEM Definitions: Figure 1

	STEM Fields Life/Physical Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics, Information Technologies	Top Occupations Computer and Information Systems Managers, Computer Support Specialists
	STEM Polotod Fields	Ten Occupations
Qg	Health occupations	Registered Nurses, Physicians, Medical & Health Services Managers
	STEM-Skilled Fields Applied technical fields	Top Occupations Carpenters, 1st Line Supervisors, Construction Trades/Extraction Workers Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics
2	Non-STEM All other fields	Top Occupations Managers (all other) Elementary and Middle School Teachers

The following report provides more detail and an update on the gender gap in Wake County in light of COVID-19. This report also provides a summary of research completed thus far on the contributing factors to the gender wage and representation gaps in Wake County, the experiences of women currently working in STEM fields, and the working theory of change and outcome measures that can be used to build the strategic action framework.

Wake County Labor Force

Wake County Labor Force

With a population of over one million and rising, Wake County is growing, with the city of Raleigh at its hub and Research Triangle Park on its western edge, anchored by the research, technology and biotech industries in the town of Cary and Durham County (Figure 2).



Wake County map: Figure 2

The total labor force in Wake County is comprised of employed and unemployed citizens of working age, estimated at about 560,000 citizens as of May 2020. Of the total labor force (Figure 3), 49% are women and the three largest race groups by gender are White men (32.3% of the total labor force), White females (29% of the total labor force) and Black or African American women (12% of the total labor force).

Wake County Labor Force by Race and Ethnicity: Figure 3



Wake County TOTAL Labor Force by Race and Ethnicity: Figure 3A



Sources: Burning Glass © estimates based on American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Percentages among the entire table add-up to 100%. The Wake County workforce is among the most educated in the nation, where 80% of females in the labor force have at least some post-secondary education compared to 75% of men (Table 1).

	Less than High School	High School Diploma or GED	Some College or Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree	TOTAL LABOR FORCE
Total GENDER	40,315	82,890	157,329	186,937	91,128	558,599
Female	6.2%	13.0%	30.4%	34.0%	16.4%	274,054
Male	8.2%	16.6%	26.0%	33.0%	16.2%	284,543

Wake County Workforce by Education: Table 1

Sources: Burning Glass © estimates based on American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Percentages among the rows add-up to 100%

However, education among the labor force varies by race and ethnic groups. Whereas 58% of White workers have post-secondary credentials at the bachelor's level and above, 33% of Black or African American workers have these credentials (Table 2).

	High School	Diploma or GED	Associate' s Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate Degree	LABOR FORCE
Total	40,315	82,890	157,329	186,937	91,128	558,599
RACE /						
ETHNICITY						
American Indian						
or Alaska Native	10.1%	16.2%	39.5%	23.5%	10.7%	1,012
Asian	7.1%	8.2%	12.7%	34.2%	37.8%	34,868
Black or African						
American	7.8%	21.9%	37.1%	23.3%	10.0%	119,703
Hispanic or						
Latino	32.7%	23.7%	23.3%	14.4%	5.9%	49,540
Native Hawaiian						
or Other Pacific						
Islander	9.7%	0.0%	0.0%	82.8%	7.5%	134
Other	10.4%	26.9%	18.8%	30.4%	13.6%	1,387
Two or More						
Races	6.5%	13.5%	35.2%	32.0%	12.9%	11,263
White	3.3%	11.8%	27.1%	39.8%	18.0%	340,692

Wake County Educational Attainment and Race and Ethnicity: Table 2

Sources: Burning Glass © estimates based on American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Percentages among the rows add-up to 100% The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting different demographic groups in different ways. While the overall unemployment rate in Wake County jumped from 4% to 11.5% between March 2020 and May 2020, unemployment rates were higher for females than for males, with Black or African American females and Hispanic or Latina females experiencing higher unemployment rates (19.6%) than White females and White men (Fig. 4).



Wake County Unemployment by Race and Ethnicity: Figure 4

Sources: Burning Glass © estimates based on American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Percentages among the rows result in the average unemployment rate in the third column. Other is self-identified on the ACS when a respondent does not feel they fit in any other category.

Wake County Economy, Employment and Wages

Wake County Economy, Employment and Wages

Fastest Growing Occupations

Ranked by the Brookings Institution as the #2 "very large metro area for overall prosperity index" in the U.S., by the Wall Street Journal as the #5 "Hottest Labor Market in the Nation", and by EMSI as #9 among Talent Attractors in the nation in 2019, Wake County has great economic opportunity, out-pacing both state and national averages in employment growth and wage growth (JobsEQ, 2020). Much of this growth is forecasted to be highest in jobs in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and STEM-related fields (health care and skilled trades), as well as in the management pipelines associated with these fields (Figure 5).



Highest Paying and Growing Occupations in Wake County: Figure 5

Occupation	2019 Jobs	2029 Jobs	Change in Jobs (2019-2029)	% Change	2018 Median Hourly Earnings
negistered Nurses	11,294	13,677	2,383	21%	\$30.96
Software Developers, Applications	9,744	12,112	2,368	24%	\$48.28
General and Operations Managers	7,752	9,101	1,349	17%	\$58.87
Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	4,141	5,262	1,121	27%	\$31.11
Accountants and Auditors	5,815	6,708	893	15%	\$33.37
Management Analysts	2,519	3,286	767	30%	\$40.46
Business Operations Specialists, All Other	6,095	6,805	710	12%	\$33.12
💼 Civil Engineers	3,153	3,830	677	21%	\$40.30
Computer Systems Analysts	6,503	7,138	635	10%	\$44.16
🖶 Financial Managers	2,210	2,774	564	26%	\$59.85

Source: JobsEQ* data as of 2019

These are among the highest paying occupations in Wake County, but they are also projected to have the highest gaps between labor force supply and demand. In Figure 6 below, bars on the upper left side of the diagram (red) are higher-wage jobs in which we will have far fewer workers than needed annually. Bars on the lower right side of the diagram (blue) show lower-wage jobs in which we will have more workers than needed. In general, jobs in highest demand are also those where salaries are higher.

Wake County Occupation Gaps: Figure 6



Occupation Gaps

Potential Average Annual Occupation Gaps over 10 Years in Wake County, North Carolina

Even after the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in March 2020, when unemployment rates in Wake County rose from 4% to 11.2% in one month, job postings among STEM and STEM-related occupations continued to remain high and steady, though the top employers in the county posting job openings in these fields are having difficulty filling them.

O*NET Code	Occupation	Job Postings
3/15/2020-6/10/2020		
15-1132.00	Software Developers, Applications	3,280
41-4012.00	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	1,859
11-9199.00	Managers, All Other	1,543
41-2031.00	Retail Salespersons	1,157
29-1141.00	Registered Nurses	1,145
53-3032.00	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	999
43-4051.00	Customer Service Representatives	930
15-1151.00	Computer User Support Specialists	849
41-1011.00	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	800
15-1199.09	Information Technology Project Managers	698

Wake County STEM Job Postings: Table 3

Source: Labor Insight (Burning Glass Technologies)

Yet, even though Raleigh has been noted as one of the top 10 cities in the U.S. best positioned to recover from the COVID-19 crisis (Moody's Analytics/Forbes), the historically lower representation and wages of women in STEM and STEM-related fields in Wake County threaten to thwart this comeback. A study of 2018 U.S. Census data conducted by Wake Invests in Women (in collaboration with Wake Tech and support from RTI International) revealed that women are significantly underrepresented in STEM and STEM-related occupations (Figure 7).



Gender Representation Gaps in STEM: Figure 7

Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina Women are especially underrepresented in STEM fields compared to their relative proportion in the labor force (Figure 8). For example, while Black or African American women make up about 9% of the non-STEM workers in this study, they make up only 5% of STEM workers.



Wake County Race and Ethnicity in STEM: Figure 8

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Black or African American women make up about 9% of employees in non-STEM and only 5% in STEM fields.

NON-STEM FIELDS

Hispanic or Latina women are significantly underrepresented with only 1.3% in STEM fields.

STEM FIELDS

Of particular concern are the large gaps in representation between women and men in occupations where employers are having a hard time finding workers. Among those are software developers and computer user support specialists (Figure 9).



Occupational Gaps: Figure 9

In addition to representation, on average, women earn less in STEM and STEMrelated occupations. The greatest disparities are among Hispanic or Latina and Black or African American women compared to White males among all STEM fields.

Sub-Population of Interest	Comparison Group	Percent of Wages Earned of Comparison Group
Female Asian	Male White	83.51%***
Female Black or African American	Male White	73.06%***
Female Hispanic or Latina	Male White	69.21%***
Female NHPI, AIAN, & Multirace	Male White	79.52%**
Female White	Male White	77.08%***
Male Asian	Male White	91.19%
Male Black or African American	Male White	80.48%***
Male Hispanic or Latino	Male White	81.39%***
Male NHPI, AIAN, & Multirace	Male White	89.03%*

Percent Wages Earned by Gender and Race and Ethnicity: Table 4

Differences of Sex Race Least Squares Means (hourly wages) * P < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

And while some of this wage disparity may be due to the difference in representation of women in specific occupations, even within occupations there are wage gaps between females and males. For example, while some high-demand occupations in Wake County show near wage parity between females and males, such as computer support specialists, many other occupations show wage disparities, even among occupations where women have high representation, such as registered nurses (Table 5). While some occupations are close to gender wage parity, race and ethnicity disparity gaps are present (Table 6). Computer systems analysts and computer support specialists who are White make around \$8-\$10 more per hour, on average, than those who are Black or African American. Future research will seek to determine if disparity gaps exist within occupations when examining the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity.

		MALE	FEMALE		
STEM Occupation		Hourly Wage	Hourly Wage		
	Ν	Mean	Ν	Mean	
Computer Systems Analysts	111	\$39.65	72	\$33.69	
Computer Support Specialists	211	\$32.06	85	\$32.02	
Registered Nurses	54	\$30.63	543	\$29.46	

Wage Gaps in High Demand STEM Occupations by Gender: Table 5

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org

Wage Gaps in High Demand STEM Occupations by Race and Ethnicity: Table 6

	White		Black/ African American		Asian		NHPI, AIAN, & Multirace			
	Hour	y Wage	Hour	ly Wage	Hour	ly Wage	Hour	ly Wage	Hourl	y Wage
	Ν	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	Ν	Mean
Computer Systems Analysts	112	\$37.66	30	\$29.37	6	**	29	\$44.62	6	**
Computer Support Specialists	204	\$33.64	34	\$24.00	16	**	35	\$37.41	7	**
Network and Computer Systems Administrators	75	\$33.57	11	**	2	**	7	**	1	**
Registered Nurses	450	\$29.56	75	\$29.23	20	**	37	\$30.78	15	**

Experiences of Women in STEM in Wake County

A series of focus groups conducted in October 2019 with women in STEM fields in and around Wake County provided WIIW insight into the lived experiences of women in STEM. The participants spoke of fighting to have their voices heard and their ideas and contributions taken seriously, regularly having their expertise questioned in their field, and consistently having to prove their right to be there, both in terms of their industries and positions. Three primary themes were identified: Lack of representation, bias and discrimination, and career frustrations.

Lack of Representation

Many of the women were frequently the only woman in the room on their teams and described company leadership and upper management as non-representative and homogeneous, especially in upper management and executive leadership (C-Suite).

"There's a line from me to the CEO, all men ... the mentorship opportunities are still there, but I have to ask for it. And it doesn't feel like there are as many people coming to me and saying, 'Oh, I want to help you'."

Bias & Discrimination

All the women described regularly facing stereotypes, unconscious bias, as well as outright discrimination at various points throughout their careers.

"A lot of the men who are in these positions still have the idea that women don't want these positions or women aren't as smart or aren't as technical. And so I think that that's one of the most difficult things I think, to get over some of these preconceived notions that people have."

The WIIW focus group participants noted that they regularly experience their work contributions being ignored, their expertise being questioned, and being held to a higher standard than their male counterparts. As one respondent made poignantly clear, these invisible factors can lead to women in STEM questioning: "If my passion is to make it better ... at what point do [I ask myself], is this really worth it? ... to deal with that stress of being the first, or the only, or to constantly prove myself?"

Career Frustrations

The participants expressed feelings of frustration over how they were treated in their workplaces, leading many to question their place in the workforce.

"...that kind of pressure drove me to do even better and then to break that door and move forward to do something else and then grow in that space. But it takes a lot of tenacity, resilience, it's too much. You can't do that for 20 years, 25 years of your life, to continuously prove yourself."

Relevant Literature Highlights

An in-depth analysis of national research conducted by the WIIW research team revealed common factors that underlie and perpetuate the gender wage gap in STEM fields. As depicted in Table 7 below, about two-thirds of the gender wage gap can be explained by quantifiable factors such as race, ethnicity, educational attainment, experience, and the segregation of women and men by industry and occupation. The table also shows education as a negative factor in the gap, meaning it works to narrow the gap between women and men. However, the final third of the gap is unexplained by these readily observable factors and may be due to other factors such as discrimination and unconscious bias (Blau & Kahn, 2016).

VARIABLES	2010 Effect of Gender Gap in Explanatory Variables (%of Gender Gap Explained)
Education	-5.9%
Experience	14.1%
Region	.3%
Race	4.3%
Unionization	-1.3%
Industry	17.6%
Occupation	32.9%
TOTAL EXPLAINED	62%
TOTAL UNEXPLAINED	38%
TOTAL PAY GAP	100%

Gender Gap by Quantifiable Factors: Table 7

Blau, F. & Kahn, L. (2016). The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations. IZA, No. 9656. Retrieved from http://ftp.iza.org/dp9656.pdf.

Industry and Occupational Segregation

Lack of female representation in higher-wage industries and occupations has been noted as explaining about half of the factors influencing the gender wage gap across all demographics. Occupational segregation, where one demographic group is over- or underrepresented in a field (i.e. male-dominated versus female-dominated), perpetuates the gender wage gap and accounts for 33% of its existence (Blau & Kahn, 2016; Hegewisch et al., 2018; Michelmore & Sassler, 2016; Schumaker-Krieg, 2017). A 2018 report entitled "Rebooting Representation" (McKinsey & Company & Pivotal Ventures) found that the number of women holding tech roles, which are among the highest growth and earning potential occupations, rather than increasing with demand has actually been in steady decline over the last 25 years. Within STEM fields women are more likely to work in lower-paying sectors of the STEM workforce, such as healthcare occupations where they are significantly overrepresented (Michelmore & Sassler, 2016; Hegewisch et al., 2018).

Marital and Family Status

The 2017 Women in the Workplace report found a strong correlation between gender equality within a society and gender equity at work, which suggests, "that the barriers that hold women back in society may be hindering them from participating more fully in the workforce" (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.org, p. 4). Marital and family status may also influence women's choices into lower paying/lower demand and more flexible occupations. The desire to balance a career alongside family financial needs, the high cost of childcare, and caregiver responsibilities lead to a higher share of women working part-time or opting out of the workforce while children are young. Fewer hours worked or long breaks in work history due to caregiving roles contribute to lower pay experienced by females compared to males (Wells Fargo Securities Economics Group, 2017). For example, in computer science, persistent wage gaps exist between White, Asian, and Hispanic or Latina women and their male counterparts even after accounting for years of potential work experience and other observed factors, like whether they were married or had children (Michelmore & Sassler, 2016).

Management Pipeline Momentum

Males and females often start at similar entry-level positions, but women lose momentum through the pipeline over time and tend to be employed in lower-level positions (Blau & Kahn, 2016; McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.org, 2018). Women tend to lack access to many supports needed to advance in their careers, such as mentorships, sponsorships (people in management roles advocating on their behalf and supporting their career growth), and professional networks (Rayome, 2017). The lack of representation of women in upper management and leadership roles may also play into the lack of career momentum. Three times as many women, compared to their male counterparts, feel that their gender has had a negative impact on their ability to move forward in their fields, causing them to miss out on raises and promotions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.org, 2018). The disparity in the promotion rate to manager is even worse for Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women.

Organizational Context

Within a company or organization, the existing policies, structures and practices can either perpetuate or support closing the pay gap. Starting with the recruitment and hiring of employees, recommended strategies include making sure the job description includes the salary range, creating company-wide policy restricting the asking of salary history, and conducting blind initial screenings of applicants (Women's Leadership Institute, 2018). When companies ask applicants to report their previous (or current) salary on a job application, they are perpetuating and potentially exacerbating the pay gap between men and women. If a woman is already earning less than her male counterparts at her previous position she will not have the same leverage to negotiate for a higher salary in her new role.

Businesses that prohibit employees discussing their pay with other employees create an environment of secrecy that prevents employees from knowing salary at varying levels of the company and does

not allow for comparison of salary across the same position. While this practice disadvantages all employees, it further harms women who are being paid less. Using statewide longitudinal data, Kim (2015) demonstrated that in states where wage transparency policies were adopted, women had 3% higher wages compared to states that do not have such policies. Furthermore, this reduced the wage gap between 6% and 18%, with the highest gap reductions for women who earned at least a college degree.

Policy and Legislative Context

At the Federal level, several laws exist which prohibit discrimination based on sex and gender, including the Civil Rights Act (1964), Equal Credit Opportunity Act, Pregnancy Discrimination act, and Family Medical Leave Act. A recent Supreme Court decision in the Bostock v. Clayton County civil rights case ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees against discrimination based on sexual orientation as well as gender identity. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits wage discrimination based on sex. Under this Act, employers are required to pay individuals equal pay for equal work (skills required, effort/responsibility, working conditions) with the focus being on the content of the job, not the title of the position https://www.eeoc.gov/fact-sheet/federal-laws-prohibiting-job-discrimination-questions-and-answers).

North Carolina does not currently have any state level equal pay laws, but it does have an employment discrimination law that protects all North Carolinians' right to seek, obtain, and hold employment without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, or religion. At the state level, Governor Roy Cooper has signed several executive orders to address gender equity gaps for women working state agencies under the Governor's purview including eliminating the use of wage history in the state hiring process (Executive Order No. 93) and providing paid parental leave (Executive Order #95).

Systemic Factors

Taken individually, these components create an incomplete picture of why and how the gender wage gap persists. To fully understand the persistence and impact of the gender wage gap, less quantifiable systemic factors, such as discrimination and harassment, must also be considered. Women in STEM fields indicated that their educational and career trajectories are negatively impacted by these factors (Shein, 2018; Tiku, 2019). Sixty-four percent of women in the Women in the Women in the Workplace report (2018) reported experiencing micro-aggressions in their everyday work life.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model below (Figure 10) visually represents how these factors intersect, influence, and perpetuate the gender wage gap in STEM fields.

Gender Wage Gap Conceptual Model: Figure 10



Moving Forward

Given that Wake County has pending labor-force gaps in its highest-demand jobs even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, how can Wake County help unemployed women access these jobs, move from lower-paying jobs into these higher-paying jobs, and achieve pay equity with men? The answer is Wake Invests in Women, which is uniquely positioned to help Wake County not only rebuild but thrive. Though its research-based practices and collective impact approach, the Wake Invests in Women initiative is designed to work with community partners in crafting, "pro-active, large-scale, and integrated measures...to make strong and sustained impacts" based on Wake County-specific research (International Labor Organization, 2020). In this way, Wake County can continue its forward momentum in making gains in gender diversity, equity, and inclusion while rebuilding in a post COVID-19 workforce.

To achieve wage equity in Wake County, Wake Invests in Women is proposing three goals based on its research: greater representation of women in STEM occupations, greater momentum of women through the management pipeline, and achievement of wage parity within occupations. Given the high unemployment rates and greater wage gaps among Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women, the initiative will focus and prioritize its activities on increasing Black or African American and Hispanic or Latina women entering into STEM and STEMadjacent fields, those already in these fields who want to move into management, and on closing the wage disparities that exist within these occupations (Representation, Career Advancement, Wage Parity).

> The Wake Invests in Women initiative is designed to work with community partners in crafting, "pro-active, large-scale, and integrated measures...to make strong and sustained impacts"



WAKE INVESTS IN WOMEN CHALLENGE

Wake Invests in Women is seeking partners to join the annual WIIW Challenge by pledging to implement at least one of the ideas in the working theory of change, or to work with partners to develop and test new ones. The WIIW Challenge focuses on key areas for making substantive long-term progress in closing the gender wage/occupation gaps in Wake County. WIIW asks partners to focus on one or more of these areas during the challenge year in order to promote a holistic approach to systemic change. The challenge is designed to be adaptable and scalable over time to meet the unique needs of each organization's journey toward gender parity.





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